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ABSTRACT

One hundred thirty-six teachers enrolled in special education courses responded to a questionnaire which focused on stress in relationship to compliance with the mandates of Public Law 94-142 (Education for All Handicapped Children Act). The teachers were divided into three groups - special education teachers, resource room teachers, and regular classroom teachers. The results have implications for administrators, educators, and parents/community. Among findings were that special education teachers tend to experience less stress, that the increased frequency of meetings mandated by P.L. 94-142 has increased the amount of stress experienced by special education teachers in compliance with the law, that the presence of clear role expectations greatly reduces stress, and that the more satisfied a teacher is in the professional role the less stress is experienced. Other findings indicate that assessment/diagnosis is the most stressful activity for both regular classroom and resource room teachers; while writing individualized educational plans and due process paper work were rated as low stress factors. (Author/PHR)

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P. L. 94-142 and Stress: An Analysis and Direction for the Future

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Introduction

During the last few years, the move toward accountability, parent involvement, taxpayer revolt and the specific mandates of P.L. 94-142 including team meetings and Individualized Education Programs (IEP's) have significantly affected educators. These factors have been added to previous concerns about class size, menial responsibilities, low salaries, and the increasing problem of school violence (Long, Morse and Newman, 1971; Adams, 1975; Sylvester, 1977). It would seem that these factors could have a significant impact on the mental health of all educators (Stevenson and Milt, 1975; Brown and Lewis, 1977).

Stress is a positive or negative reaction which occurs when there is a substantial imbalance (perceived or real) between environmental demand and the response capability of the individual (McGrath, 1970). Negative stressors that usually lead to unhealthy nonproductive behaviors are: 1) uncertainty, especially in the absence of feedback concerning job performance 2) role overload and role underload, role overload might be for example, a teacher who has the responsibility for programming exceptional children, but is covertly expected to handle all crises associated with implementing P.L. 94-142 in his/her building; role underload is the building staff that gets "geared up" for P.L. 94-142 and then is underutilized within staffings or other related activities. 3) Abrupt and unplanned organizational and role change especially during the P.L. 94-142 process 4) Poor job design, i.e. poor planning and division of work within P.L. 94-142. It would seem likely that the concerns cited above could be causing increasing stress on educators, particularly special services personnel. If this assumption is correct and if the specific causes of stress could be identified, then action might be taken to prevent or remedy these situations. For example, if the responsibilities of diagnosticians and child placement team members are

causing stress, then preservice or inservice training programs could be implemented to better prepare educators for those roles. If IEP writing is a major problem, administrators could try to find ways to make the IEP process simpler. For example, provide secretarial help, more release time for special services and regular education personnel or developing more efficient IEP-writing strategies.

This study was designed to answer the following questions: a) to what extent is stress a problem for educators? b) is there a relationship between the implementation of P.L. 94-142 and teacher stress? c) what are the major factors creating stress for educators? and d) tentatively what are the stressful conditions with which educators are coping?

Procedure

Sample

There were 136 teachers who completed the questionnaire. These educators at the time were enrolled in special education courses. The sample was, however, limited to those respondents who completely filled out the questionnaire and were employed as full time classroom teachers, special educators, special services personnel or administrators during the previous school year. This group represented 81% of those who responded. The subjects were placed in one of three final groups: 1) special education teachers (N=39), 2) resource room teachers (N=31) and 3) regular classroom teachers (N=40).

Method

Questionnaires were distributed on the first day of summer session classes at three colleges in the State of Connecticut. The state university, a state college and a private university from different geographical regions of the state were represented. Educators enrolled in four special education classes at each institution were asked to complete the questionnaire. Participants

anonymously completed the questionnaire during the first twenty minutes of class and returned it to the professor.

The questionnaire inquired about compliance with P.L. 94-142 mandates, the degree and type of stress on educators and the specific causes of stress. Items for the questionnaire were selected based on a review of the literature on stress and an analysis of the requirements for implementing P.L. 94-142. The questionnaire was pretested and revised prior to distribution to the three colleges.

Results

A one way analysis of variance was performed to compare the degree to which the three types of educators experienced job related stress. With possible responses ranging from "1" (never) to "5" (always), mean scores for special education, resource room and regular classroom teachers are 3.59, 3.23 and 3.11, respectively. The analysis of variance, however, fails to show a significant difference between the three groups (F (2,123) = 2.341, NS). While not significant, this is suggestive of moderate differences between groups.

Multiple regression analyses were performed to identify those variables which in combination would be strongly correlated with the degree to which a teacher perceived his/her job to be stressful. The first set of regressions broke the sample into three subsets: special education teachers, resource room teachers, and regular classroom teachers. Only for special education teachers is a significant correlation between "stress" and any of the "compliance" variables found: R = .398; F (2,36) = 3.395, $p < .05$. The predictor variables observed are "parents invited to meetings" and "PPT met for each child." As can be seen in Table 1, "parents invited to meetings" is negatively related to stress and "PPT met for each child" is positively weighted. For resource room and

regular classroom teachers, no significant relationships were found between "compliance" variables and stress: F (1,29) = 0.754 and F (1,51) = 0.651, respectively.

Table 1

Regression Summary Tables for Special Education Teachers

A. Role Expectations & Satisfaction

Step	Variable	Mult R	R^2	R^2 Change	r
1.	Clear Role Expectations	.429	.184	.184	-.429
2.	Perception of Competence	.506	.256	.072	-.224
3.	Supervisor's Perception of Stress	.569	.324	.068	.212
4.	Satisfaction w/ Role	.617*	.380	.056	-.420

*F (4,34) = 5,212, $p < .01$

B. Compliance

Step	Variable	Mult R	R^2	R^2 Change	r
1.	Parents Invited to Meetings	.274	.075	.075	-.274
2.	PPT Met for Each Child	.398*	.159	.084	.244

*F (2,36) = 3.395, $p < .05$

Table 2

Regression Summary Tables for Resource Room Teachers

A. Role Expectations & Satisfaction

Step	Variable	Mult R	R^2	R^2 Change	r
1.	Supervisor's Perception of Stress	.529	.279	.279	.529
2.	Satisfaction w/Role	.621	.385	.106	-.374
3.	Perception of Competence	.691	.477	.092	-.201
4.	Clear Role Expectations	.764*	.583	.106	.039

*F (4,26) = 9.101, $p < .001$

B. Compliance

No Significant Predictors of Stress; F (1,29) = 0.754 NS

Table 3

Regression Summary Tables for Regular Room Teachers

A. Role Expectations & Satisfaction

Step	Variable	Mult R	R^2	R^2 Change	r
1.	Supervisor's Perception of Stress	.650*	.422	.422	.650

*F (1,38) = 27.744, $p < .001$

B. Compliance

No Significant Predictors of Stress; F (1,38) = 0.134 NS

Regressions using items pertaining to role expectations and satisfaction, on the other hand, reveal significant relationships with stress for all three categories of teachers. For special education and resource room teachers, the

same four variables, though in different order of predictive power, are found to be significantly correlated with stress: "clear role expectations", "perception of competence", "supervisor's perception of stress", and "satisfaction with role." A difference arises in the order with which variables are entered; for special education teachers, the first variables entered are "clear role expectations" and "perception of competence", while for resource room teachers, the first two entered are "supervisors perception of stress" and "satisfaction with role" (see Tables 1 and 2). Multiple correlations between stress and these four variables are .617 (F (4,34) = 5.212, $p < .01$) and .764 (F (4,26) = 9.101, $p < .001$) for special education teachers and resource room teachers, respectively. For regular classroom teachers, only "supervisor's perception of stress" correlates significantly with stress (R = .650; F (1,38) = 27.744, $p < .001$). (See Table 3)

The second set of regressions broke the sample into two new subsets: elementary school teachers and middle/secondary school teachers. For neither elementary nor middle/secondary school teachers is a significant relationship found between any of the "compliance" items and stress: F (1,62) = 3.783 and F (1,51) = 0.651, respectively. Again, however, role expectation and satisfaction variables do correlate significantly with stress (R = .577, F (2,61) = 15.197, $p < .001$). For middle and secondary school teachers, multiple regression analysis shows "supervisor's preception of stress", "discrepancies in role expectations", "perception of competence", and "clear role expectations" to correlate significantly with stress; R = .725, F (4,48) = 13.314, $p < .001$. (See Tables 4 and 5)

Table 4

Regression Summary Tables for Elementary School Teachers

A. Role Expectations & Satisfaction

Step	Variable	Mult R	R^2	R^2 Change	r
1.	Supervisor's Perception of Stress	.470	.221	.221	.470
2.	Satisfaction w/Role	.577*	.332	.111	-.321

* F (2,61) = 15.197, $p < .001$

B. Compliance

No Significant Predictors of Stress; F (1,62) = 3.783 NS

Table 5

Regression Summary Tables for Middle & Secondary School Teachers

A. Role Expectations & Satisfaction

Step	Variable	Mult R	R^2	R^2 Change	r
1.	Supervisor's Perception of Stress	.598	.358	.358	.598
2.	Discrepancies in Role Expectations	.670	.449	.091	.438
3.	Perception of Competence	.695	.483	.033	.012
4.	Clear Role Expectations	.725*	.526	.043	-.356

*F (4,48) = 13.314, $p < .001$

B. Compliance

No significant Predictors of Stress; F (1,51) = 0.651 NS

When all subjects in the sample are analyzed together in multiple regression analyses, none of the compliance variables show a significant correlation with stress. A significant prediction of stress is, however, afforded with "supervisor's perception of stress", "clear role expectations", and "satisfaction with role"; $R = .616$, $F\ (3,132) = 26.976$, $p < .001$. (See Table 6)

Table 6

Regression Summary Tables for all Teachers

A. Role Expectations & Satisfaction

Step	Variable	Mult R	R^2	R^2 Change	r
1.	Supervisor's Perception of Stress	.541	.292	.292	.541
2.	Clear Role Expectations	.599	.359	.067	-.319
3.	Satisfaction w/Role	.616*	.380	.021	-.157

*$F\ (3,132) = 26.976$, $p < .001$

B. Compliance

No Significant Predictors of Stress; $F\ (1,134) = 1.941$ NS

A prelininary analysis was performed to determine which job related factors teachers found most stressful. A rank ordering of these factors by special education teachers finds the following to be the five most stressful components: 1) pupil load; 2) teaching (implementation and preparation); 3) job related work after hours; 4) interaction with parents regarding placement decisions; 5) parent conferences. For resource room teachers the five greatest stressors are: 1) diagnosis and assessment; 2) pupil load; 3) teaching (preparation and implementation); 4) evaluation by supervisor; 5) job related work after hours.

Regular education teachers ranked 1) diagnoses and assessment; 2) interaction with parents regarding placement decisions; 3) job related work after hours; 4) parent conferences; 5) teaching (implementation and preparation) as the most stressful respectively.

Discussion

The results have several implications for administrators, educators and parents/community. These implications will be discussed in four categories: a) degree to which groups differentially experience stress, b) compliance, c) job expectations and satisfaction, d) job related factors that are stressful across groups.

Stress Between Groups

Based on the analysis of variance, no significant differences in stress between the three group means were demonstrated. Because the data were suggestive of moderate differences, further analysis of differences in stress were performed. The regular classroom teachers and resource room teachers, when responding to the question "Do you perceive your job to be stressful?" made a median response of "sometimes". However, the median response for special education teachers to the same question was "seldom". A chi-square test of independence was performed to expand this finding. Special education teachers, when compared to resource room or regular classroom teachers, more frequently reported "never" or "seldom" experiencing job related stress ($\underline{X}^2$ (2) = 6.30; $\underline{p} < .05$). In other words, special education teachers more frequently tend to experience less stress. Several explanations for these results exist. For example, special education teachers as a group are more frequently in contact with P.L. 94-142 issues than the other two groups. Another possibility might be that special education teachers have more control over the children in their classrooms. Resource room teachers,

in contrast, are faced with a continual transition of students during the day.

Compliance

Based on the multiple regression analyses, only one group demonstrated a significant correlation between compliance variables and stress. For special education teachers the strongest "compliance" predictor of stress was "parents invited to meetings", which was correlated negatively. In other words, when parents were invited to Planning and Placement Team meetings, the special education teachers experienced less stress. A significant increase in predictive power is provided by the variable: "Planning and Placement Team meeting for each child." The increased frequency of meetings mandated by P.L. 94-142 seemingly has increased the amount of stress experienced by special education teachers. Several explanations and implications are indicated by these results:

1) The support of parents and the experience of supportive parents over time would seem to decrease the amount of stress experienced during planning and placement meetings. Special education teachers, as groups, have most likely experienced these types of meetings and parents because of the types of handicapping conditions they are dealing with. Conversely regular classroom teachers and resource room teachers have not had similar experiences.

2) Where resource room and regular classroom teachers simply have not had the range of experiences working with parents during planning and placement meetings, it is to be expected that no such relationship would be found for these two groups. Therefore, more extensive and intensive experiences involving parents and these two groups seems to be appropriate.

Job expectations and role satisfaction

Based on the multiple regression analyses several variables in combination

were correlated with stress across all groups: a) supervisors perception of stress is directly related to one's experiences of stress, b) the presence of clear role expectations greatly reduces the stress,and c) the more satisfied a teacher is in the professional role the less stress is experienced. Special education and resource room teachers also showed "perception of competence" to be negatively related to stress; the more confident one feels the lower the experience of stress. The explanations and implications are straightforward:

1) Administratively there is a need to clarify role expectations to reduce uncertainty in various situations. As mentioned above, role expectations and uncertainty are factors involved in stress. For example, what is the regular classroom teachers role in the diagnostic, placement and programming process as set forth by P.L. 94-142? How does this relate to the specific building? Generally administrators, staff and parents would have to provide coordinated input and discussion to help reduce role uncertainty and clarify role expectation.

2) Another important issue is the provision of systematic feedback on performance for individuals and teams. One of the biggest concerns with respect to P.L. 94-142 is follow through and follow up. The same problem exists for staff: "Are we implementing the programs according to the recommended guidelines?" or"How did I do in preparing the referral and providing input at the IEP meeting?" This strategy is directly related to the role uncertainty issue.

3) Improved job design that affects role expectation, planning, division of work and avoids abrupt and unplanned role or organizational changes is also important. The superintendent, board of education, teachers, principals and parents, all need to be given appropriate task assignments and task expectations within P.L. 94-142. This would necessitate an analysis of

the division of tasks surrounding P.L. 94-142 and would help clarify role expectations.

Job related stress factors

Preliminary rank-order analysis revealed that for all types of teachers, diagnosis and assessment is considered a highly stressful activity. For both resource room and regular classroom teachers, diagnosis and assessment is the most stressful activity. On the other hand, diagnosis and assessment was only the third most stressful activity for special education teachers.

In contrast to regular classroom teachers, resource room and special education teachers listed pupil load and teaching (implementation and preparation) as highly stressful components of their teaching responsibility. Interestingly, writing IEP's and due process paper work, two major P.L. 94-142 compliance issues were rated low in terms of producing stress. In addition, higher level consultation skills (managing student behavior and consulting with teachers) were not listed as being the most stressful.

That special education teachers rank diagnosis and assessment lower than resource room and regular classroom teachers may be accounted by the fact that special education teachers are less frequently called upon to perform said tasks. At this point in time, special education and resource room teachers have more exceptional children in their classrooms than regular classroom teachers. In view of this, it is not surprising that special service staff rank ordering of stress from pupil load and teaching (implementation and preparation) is higher than that of regular classroom teachers. The implications for the above stress related issues are clear:

1) Skill development during inservice training might focus on diagnosis and assessment. This would include inclass non-standardized and standardized

instruments and their use. This suggestion might be integrated with clarifying role expectations. i.e. What is a particular staff person's role in the diagnostic and assessment process.

2) As a preventive measure, emphasis might be placed on assisting all teachers with direct teaching skills (preparation and implementation). The specific topics are widespread for this paper but should include topics relevant to the particular system.

3) Strategies to deal with pupil load and time for preparation are both administratively and politically based. However the data presented here validated present day concerns of teacher unions and recent reports (see NEA's report: Consensus, Conflict and Challenge).

Finally, no group rated writing IEP's or due process paper work as significantly stressful. That such a major responsibility for special services staff is not found to be stressful is indeed curious. Their failure to rate it as such suggests that: 1) these teachers are not complying with this component of the law or 2) their failure to make legitimate time committments to perform this function appropriately or 3) denial as a norm, i.e., teachers responding as though IEP's and due process paper work are not stressful when clearly they are. If, in fact, any of these explanations are operating, an open forum for the discussion of P.L. 94-142 issues is needed (Shaw and Bensky, 1979). Some staff development strategies come immediately to mind:

1) Since lack of knowledge and related experiences surrounding P.L.94-142 is one factor that seems to be a precursor to stress, comprehensive inservice programs need to be developed to meet this need. However, the knowledge aspect of the inservice program is but one aspect. Accordingly, a more global and comprehensive staff development program would seem to be

appropriate. This program would work on knowledge, attitudes, and skills/competencies, as well as the organizational needs of the system.

2) As mentioned above organizational change is essential. Development of an organizational readiness to help meet the future is important. This would include individual, and team knowledge, skill attitude development as well as technological resource planning.

3) This inservice approach would hopefully develop an investment in the P.L. 94-142 process. This would enable individuals to integrate personal goals with the P.L. 94-142 and public school objectives. The area of individual incentive is also important for investment. Many strategies can be used to enhance the incentive (Shaw and Bensky, 1979).

Summary and Conclusions

As can be inferred from the above data and discussion, there are many areas of stress related to P.L. 94-142 and the educational process. It would be myopic to assume one inservice program or strategy would alleviate the stress surrounding P.L. 94-142 and teacher mental health. Rather,what has been suggested, is a comprehensive program that simultaneously and systematically addresses stress and knowledge attitude and skill development with respect to P.L. 94-142. The literature and strategies for management of both these areas is continually being developed. The overall key issue, however, is to develop and implement an integrative program that is relevant at all staff levels. The days of:"this is P.L. 94-142" or "this is an IEP" are over. Rather, the issue of how can I implement P.L. 94-142 while providing for professional survival is of utmost importance.